

## Call the right play

**F**ootball coaches put together their offensive playbooks by evaluating their teams and scouting the competition. Do they have more speed than size? Are they strong at quarterback and weak at tailback? Do they have a big offensive line and some good running backs? Or perhaps they need to run a power offense and pound it between the tackles?

Likewise, advertisers have to design their offense based on their strengths and weaknesses versus the competition. Do they have real product news or do they have to sell on emotion? Who has more money to spend on media? Are they launching a new product? Are they an old or established second-tier brand? Are they a power brand in the field? How these questions are answered determines the play of the creative.

One of the most important creative decisions to be made in the design of a television commercial is determining the right time to introduce the brand into the flow of the ad. Traditional copy testing researchers, particularly those who measure day-after recall, recommend the “early and often” rule. Their research suggests that commercials that identify the brand name in the first five seconds of the ad score best.

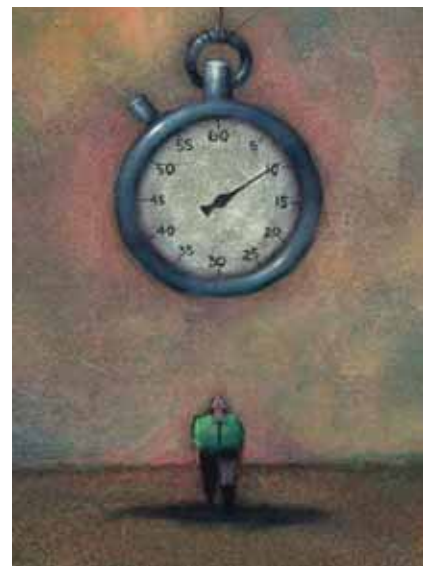
Creative teams have long resisted this rule, frequently wanting to withhold the identity of the brand to the very end of the ad. Their

argument for delaying the introduction of the brand is that consumers don't want to watch hard-core sales presentations, but rather need to be seduced by the entertaining qualities of commercials. They argue that consumers must be drawn into a brand story before the sponsor's name is revealed.

A variant of this “misdirection” approach is based on the following brand-switching argument. If you

are a regular user of Brand A, then as soon as you see in the opening seconds of a commercial that it is for competitor Brand B, you will tune out the rest of the ad because you have already made your brand choice in the category and don't want to be bothered with second-guessing yourself. Therefore, to overcome consumer defenses and get users of Brand A to take a second look at Brand

When is the best time to introduce a brand in a commercial?



By Charles Young

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B, this advertiser should withhold the brand identity as long as necessary to get the consumer interested in their brand's story.

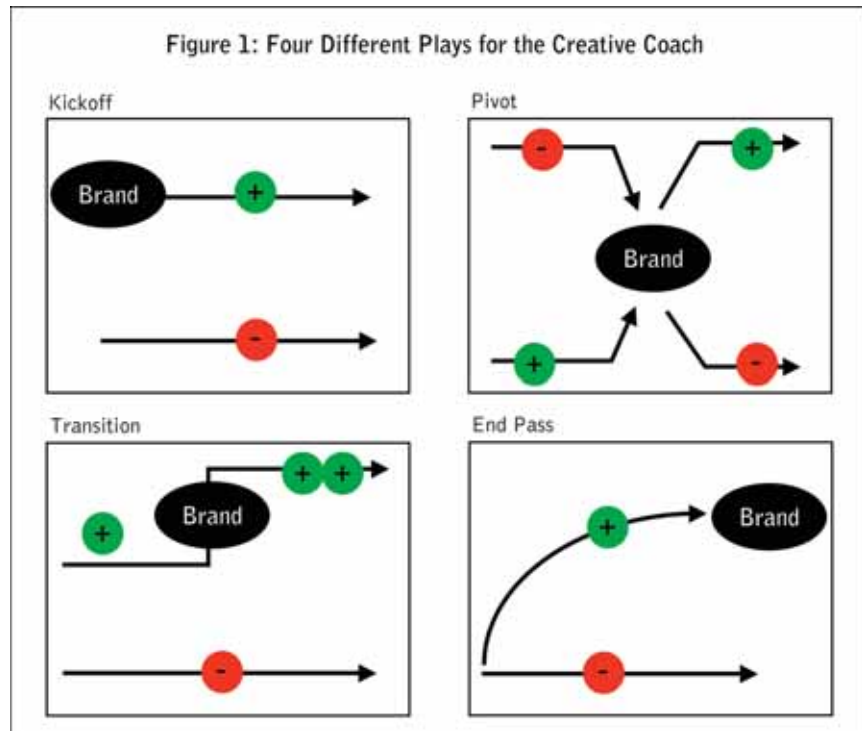
An advertiser must overcome the viewing audience's defenses, not unlike the way a professional coach must devise strategies to win a football game. If a coach runs on first-down every time, the defense will move up and crush the play before it begins. The winning coach has to have a sophisticated playbook. He has to create misdirection and use the defense's strategies against them. Run a play-action pass, a reverse, a screen. Catch the defense over-committing and over-pursuing. Likewise, advertising pros must go to their creative playbooks to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the consumer.

Our experience in testing advertising provides us with many examples of television commercials that generate high brand linkage scores when the brand is introduced in the middle, when it is not identified until the end or when it is introduced in the beginning of the ad. This suggests that the traditional strategy to always introduce the brand in the opening few seconds of a commercial is based on too simplistic a view of the game.

Coaches spend hours studying film to learn their adversaries' tendencies, philosophical beliefs and preferred plays. Likewise, ad pros spend hours studying ad film to learn consumer cognitive viewing strategies, their reactions to different kinds of emotional moves and when the consumer's eye is, or is not, on the brand.

#### A fixable problem

From our experience, we can say that a weak branding score is usually a fixable problem. Unlike low scores for attention or motivation, which may be due to a weak creative concept or a poor communication strategy, a weakness in branding can almost always be strengthened in the editing room - if you understand the underlying



structural principles that determine well-branded advertising executions.

There are two principles of branding that we refer to as focus and fit. From a focus perspective, we know from our mathematical modeling of brand linkage scores that somewhere in the flow of the commercial there must be at least one moment - what we call a "single-minded branding moment" - where the identity of the brand being advertised is at the center of the audience's visual field of interest. ("Single-minded" means there is no within-frame competition for attention to the brand identifier. Unfortunately, this competition is a common problem.) In short, there must be at least one moment where the audience's attention is focused solely on the identity of the brand that's sending them a message.

The second principle is that an advertising idea should be customized to fit the particular brand being advertised. In other words, your distinctive brand should be able to wear the ad like a millionaire athlete wears a custom-made suit, not like something purchased off-the-rack that another brand

could wear equally well. Generic creative concepts do not produce well-branded advertising executions.

In both cases quantitative diagnostic research can be used to measure how well an advertising execution focuses attention on and fits the brand. Focus is measured with an Ameritest Flow of Attention graph. It's an online picture-sorting methodology that is used to freeze time. It gives us a stop-action view of how audience attention flows and focuses from moment-to-moment on the different images in a commercial. Fit is measured with a rating statement where the consumer is asked to rate the ad on a continuum from "it could be an ad for almost anything" to "it could only be an ad for this particular brand."

The third principle of branding addresses the timing of when a brand should be introduced into an ad. The timing of a brand's arrival on the screen is not arbitrary; it's a well-determined function of the creative choices that you make about the kind of brand story you want to tell. And it's driven by the emotional structure of the ad.

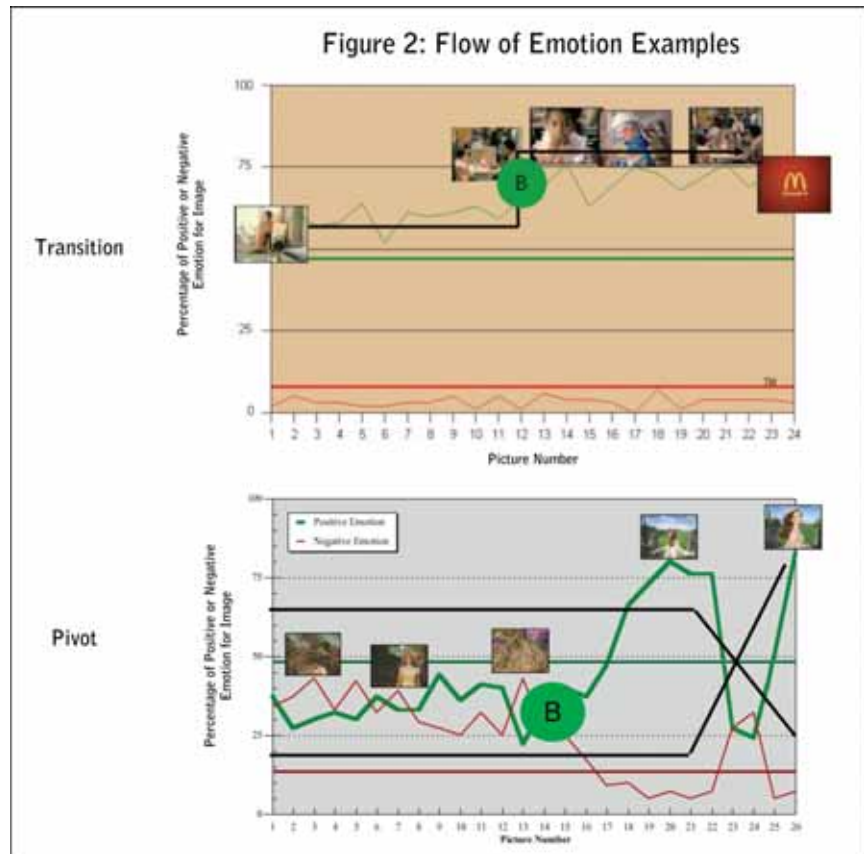
From our analysis of consumers'

emotional responses to television commercials, we have identified four archetypal structures that can be used to transfer an audience's emotional response from a television commercial to a brand (see Figure 1). These represent four different plays that the creative coach can use to move the brand forward in consumer emotions in order to score a sale. Each of the four can be powerfully effective - but each of the four structures calls for a different, right time to introduce the brand in the running flow of the commercial.

The first play is the kickoff, where the brand is brought on the field at the very beginning of the commercial and positive emotions are engaged to generate as much momentum as possible for the full run of a 30-second ad. The second play is the pivot, where negative emotions are deliberately built up in the opening moves of the play. Then, at the critical moment when the brand arrives, those emotions are reversed, leaving the audience with strong positive feelings toward the brand by the end of the ad. The third play is the transition, which starts with audience emotions in a mild, positive state (e.g., fun) until the brand appears to jump audience emotions to a higher, more intense positive state (e.g., excitement). The fourth play is the end pass, where audience emotions fly toward the brand, which is waiting in the end zone of the commercial, to receive the accolades of the fans cheering in the stadium.

These primary structures have been identified empirically through the use of a second type of picture sort instant replay, the Flow of Emotion. Pictures from an ad are sorted not on recall, but rather on a respondent's positive and negative feelings toward each image in an ad. (See examples in Figure 2.)

In longer commercials, these plays can be used in combination to construct more complex adver-



tising experiences. And while each type can work well, the choice of which one to use depends on the overall marketing strategy for winning the game. A creative pro, for example, takes into account the life stage and the inherent energy of the brand being advertised in timing the brand introduction. To see why, let's examine each play in detail.

#### *The kickoff*

This presentation-style advertising is a particularly effective play for launching a new product. The goal of introductory advertising is to position an unknown brand clearly in the consumer's mental map of competing alternatives in the category. Positioning a brand is like identifying your team with a particular city - the Bears are from Chicago, the Cowboys are from Dallas and the Packers from Green Bay. A positioning anchors a brand experience in the semantic or verbal part of the brain. By definition, a commercial for a new product must send information about the

product concept to a new hometown address or positioning in the brain. That's why, for example, the commercial should first cue the category (e.g., the city) before introducing the brand name (e.g., the street address) of the new product.

A new product is a rookie that has to prove itself with functional performance before an emotional relationship with the crowd can be formed. For that reason, a new product commercial tends to be loaded with factual information - features, benefits, product advantages versus the competition, what the package looks like. Rational information like this is most easily processed by the semantic side of the brain in a linear sequence where it can be filed away in memory for future recall. This is the reason why kicking off the brand name in the first few seconds of this type of commercial is a good idea.

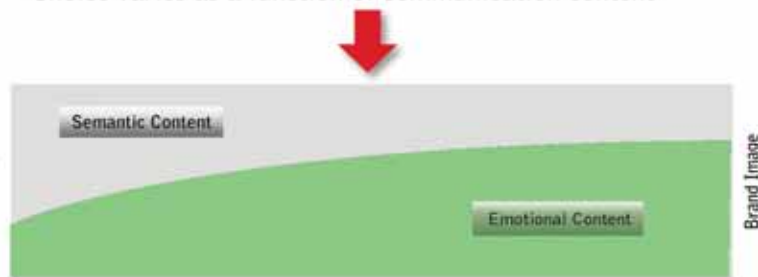
#### *The pivot*

You open the ad by intentionally creating negative tension - you

**Figure 3: Creative Choice Varies as a Function of Brand Life Stage:  
Some Common Plays**

Dramatic Structure	Life Stage		
	New Product	Established Brand	Power Brand
Kickoff	X		
Pivot		X	
Transition		X	
End Pass			X

Choice varies as a function of communication content



make your audience squirm, be engaged, get involved.

Two young people are sitting in a dark room. They type furiously on their laptop computers in some hidden place. The guy breaks into the corporate payroll system. “Whoa I got in!” “Look at what that VP makes compared to that VP,” the woman responds. “I bet he doesn’t know that!” “Sure he does,” the guy says as he pops the return key. “I just e-mailed everyone in the company.” Then a superimposed message appears on the screen: “You Are So Ready for IBM.”

Problem/solution commercials have been a very popular genre of advertising. Using drama to make a problem seem important is one way of making the solution seem important. Indeed, for some established brands, preemptively “owning” the consumer problem may be the marketing strategy rather than selling one specific solution.

Pivots in our inner emotional states can be quite rapid, with one emotional state flipping over to its opposite in the blink of an eye. The tipping point between one emotional state and another can be quite precise. Such a boundary be-

tween emotional states is the center of maximum drama.

This is the precise moment when a brand should be introduced in a pivot-type ad. By placing the brand at the boundary between a negative emotional state and a positive emotional state, the brain unconsciously draws the conclusion that the brand is the cause of the transformation from negative to positive - and so the brand becomes the hero of the spot! In contrast, we have a number of empirical examples of commercials that were poorly branded because the brand was introduced five seconds too soon into the dramatic storyline.

#### *The transition*

Here is a sample scenario for a positive transition ad:

Traffic is moving along slowly, with cars herded together like comfortable cattle. We see a driver in his 4X4 SUV. He looks around coolly, pops a gear and unexpectedly turns off the crowded highway to climb a 60-degree incline. You feel the exhilaration of driving his brand-new car as he flies over the mountain.

In this type of advertising there is no role for negative emotion, but

nonetheless the structure represents a movement from one emotional place, a low positive, to another place, a higher positive or different, more intense emotion. Commercials that attempt to reposition established brands in an emotion space or those that communicate a “new and improved” message might be examples of this category of advertising.

In many ways commercials of this type are like pivot ads in that the brand plays an explicit role in the story’s action. Again, if the brand is timed to arrive at the precise boundary of the quantum jump from one emotional state to another, the brain will interpret the brand as the cause of the transition to a more positive state. And as a result, as with pivot ads, the appearance of the brand would be expected in the middle, not at the beginning nor at the end, of the ad.

#### *The end pass*

A guy walks into surgery all scrubbed up. A nurse dramatically puts the surgical gloves on him. He goes to work on the patient, saving his life. But wait, who is this guy? A nurse asks him what hospital he’s from. “Oh, I’m not a surgeon,” he says confidently, “but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night.”

The end pass is a powerful play, but it’s a somewhat risky play for a new product launch or a small brand with little to spend. There is a chance that consumers who do not stay involved to the end of the storyline will not learn the brand’s identity. This would inhibit the building of awareness and thus trial or penetration of the brand.

This type of advertising is usually used to add to a brand’s image by telling brand stories of a humorous or dramatic nature. Its content is almost entirely emotional, though the emotions still have to fit the positioning established by the brand early in its life stage. Usually power brands have earned the right

to do this kind of advertising through large investments in media over time or by developing such a distinctive, recognizable style of advertising that the consumer has no trouble predicting who the brand will be when it appears, inevitably, at the end of the commercial. An example of a power brand would be IBM, which rarely shows its name before the end of its blue letterbox television commercials.

### Opposing creative principles

At the most basic level, positioning a brand and building a brand image are the opposing creative principles of advertising. Positioning anchors a brand in the mind by establishing a rational context within a relevant frame of competing brand claims. It requires clarity and

consistency of communication. Positioning is about semantics or how, on a conceptual level, a brand fits clearly into the mental map that the consumer has formed of the category.

In contrast, image is the part of a brand that grows and flowers with each new ad execution that creates emotional connections to the consumer's inner self - so that a consumer will come to feel ownership of a brand over time. Brand image requires freshness and variety of expression. Brand image is about aesthetics - or how you touch a consumer emotionally.

From a marketing standpoint, in terms of the job that a particular television commercial has to do, the balance of effort involved in positioning a brand and building a brand shifts as a function of the

brand's life stage (see Figure 3). Semantic information content tends to be higher at the beginning of a brand's life; emotional content tends to be higher as the brand matures. It is within this framework, the longer view of the marketing time scale, that the creative decision about which dramatic structure to use in a particular commercial must be made. On multiple levels, therefore, creating well-branded advertising is about getting the timing right. **IQ**

### References

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